

PS 3521

.L4 K5

1913

Copy 1

KIRSTIN

Alice Cole Kleene



Class PS3521

Book .L4K5

Copyright N^o 1913

COPYRIGHT DEPOSIT.

KIRSTIN

A PLAY IN FOUR ACTS

BY

ALICE COLE KLEENE

11



BOSTON
SHERMAN, FRENCH & COMPANY
1913

793.21

.L4 K5
1913

COPYRIGHT, 1913
SHERMAN, FRENCH & COMPANY

\$1.00

JAN 16 1914

©CL A361614

TO
ELISABETH WORK HOOKER

A version of the story by
Hans Christian Andersen

CHARACTERS

BELOW THE SEA

KIRSTIN, a sea-nymph

ERIK, the deep-sea king

GERDA, aged grandmother of Kirstin

THORA, a sea-nymph

ASTRID, the enchantress

DISA

SIGRID

ERLHILD

GUDRID

INGEBORG

} sisters of Kirstin

Sea-nymphs, kings, monsters, and sprites.

IN THE WORLD

KIRSTIN

OSGOD, a prince

DAGMAR, a queen, mother of Osgod

INGA, a princess

People of the court, ancient man, legate, and
sailors.

ACT I

TABLEAU I

GROTTO AT THE BOTTOM OF THE SEA

*The scene represents the hall of a sea-king's palace. In the background to the left * of the center, the wall has the vague form of pillars, between which several corridors give entrance to the ballroom. Down * the stage to the right is an entrance to the other rooms of the palace and halfway up the stage to the left a broad archway leads to the sea. Near the footlights to the left is a low seat of rock partly sheltered by some branching sea-growth, and beside it, leaning against the wall, the battered figure-head of a ship, showing the head and breast of a woman. To the right and well down the stage, an armchair of porphyry stands at an angle to the wall. Shells and flowers of the sea wrought into garlands hang about the*

* Right and left mean the right and left of a person on the stage facing the audience. Up and down the stage mean respectively away from and toward the footlights.

grotto and are twined in ropes around the pillars. The floor is strewn with sand and over all there streams a soft, unearthly light. The time is evening of the birthday when Kirstin has become old enough to visit the world.

The rising curtain discovers GERDA seated in the armchair of porphyry, combing her long hair, white as the foam of the sea. Tiny creatures with bodies of gold and silver, and iridescent wings that pulse like fins, flit through the archway, bringing in the folds of their gauzy garments pearls and pieces of coral which they pour down on the sand to form a little heap on either side of GERDA. One group clustered about the heap of pearls, and the other around that of corals, begin to string them into two long necklaces. Without is heard a chorus of voices, at first far off, but soon close at hand. Enter on the left the five sisters of KIRSTIN, laden with rose and purple sea-anemones, which they arrange on the pillars and walls of the grotto, still singing:

CHORUS

Come, come, come away,
For the hours are sweet as a silver bell,
And life was made to be merry and gay,
Down where the sea-nymphs dwell

Fathoms deep in the ocean stream
Where the coral branches gently sway,
And shells of pearl and opal gleam
On the gold and silver-grey.
O life was made to be merry and gay;
If the heart be light, then all is well.
We have no need to toil or pray,
Fathoms deep where the sea-nymphs dwell,
For the hours are sweet as a silver bell,
And life was made to be merry and gay.
Come, come, come away.

Come, come, come away,
To laugh and sing, to dance and roam
Merrily, merrily all the day
Over the fields of foam.
Climb up to a world all blue and gold,
Where the plunging herds of porpoise play,
And the old sea lion, wise and bold,
Basks in a summer bay.
Merrily, merrily all the day
With a laugh and song to dance and roam
Where the south wind flings the surf and spray
Flying over the fields of foam;
To laugh and sing, to dance and roam
Merrily, merrily all the day,
Come, come, come away.

The comb has fallen from the hand of GERDA,

who has been sitting in a drowsy attitude as if dozing, but the song ended, she starts up and looks about the grotto, then bending forward, peers at the sprites to scrutinize their work.

GERDA. Give me those pearls.

SPRITE. I gathered them myself
By the moonlight.

GERDA. They are not white enough.
I bade you bring me nothing but the whitest
For Kirstin's birthday necklace,—such as
these

Would blush for shame. [*Hands them back.*]

SPRITE. Shall I go back and see
If there be any whiter?

GERDA. Shall you go?
Quick, silly sprite.

[*Exit SPRITE. Enter others, bringing coral.*]

Now, sluggards, to your task.
Use but the rosy pieces without flaw,
Worthy of darling Kirstin, who will be
The queen of all to-night.

SIGRID. More fair than Thora,
Once called the loveliest beneath the sea,
Thora, whom never yet could sea-king win,
Because of Erik.

ERLHILD. Erik loves her not.

DISA. That garland from the deep sea Erik
sent
For Kirstin's birthday.

VOICES.

Oh, Oh!

GUDRID.

Thora is

Most beautiful.

DISA. Yes, beautiful, but Kirstin
Outshines her now.

SIGRID.

And she hath gift of song.

*Sprites pass in and out, replenishing the
heaps of pearl and coral. The group working
on the necklace of pearl rise up and bear their
string before GERDA, who grimly points to a
pearl halfway down. Running back, they pluck
this out, and go on working busily. The sis-
ters, having disposed their flowers about the
grotto, give a last touch to the garlands, and
group themselves on the sand.*

DISA. What makes our Kirstin sad?

GUDRID.

Is Kirstin sad?

INGEBORG. Nay, she is very happy.

ERLHILD.

All her years

How eagerly has our sweet sister waited
The dawning of this birthday.

GUDRID.

We are glad

That she is old enough to join us now
Whene'er we leave the depths and go to range
Over the windy waves.

INGEBORG.

We were not sad

At visiting the world, still it is strange
When from the sea one suddenly emerges
For the first time.

ERLHILD. 'Tis something that she saw
Has made our sister sad.

SIGRID. I know what she
Saw in the world to-day.

ERLHILD. When I rose first
I glided up a river and beheld
Green coral branches trembling to the blue,
And chubby children splashed in the clear
stream
As we do.

SIGRID. Kirstin saw—

DISA. And I remember
The feel of moonlight streaming on my head.
Beyond, blue smoke rose, and a lofty spire
Where loud bells called; and I was heavy-
hearted
Because I could not follow.

GUDRID. In mid-sea
I came upon an island full of gay
Petals like these, but fragile, with a smell
Strange to a flower.

SIGRID. Sisters, if ye be done,
Hear what she saw to-day, our little Kirstin—
I know, for while I followed within call,
Suddenly from the clouds a storm descended,
Shot through with fire till all the water smoked;
And to her arms drifted a drowning prince.
She clasped him close, singing a strange, wild
lay,

And heavily rested his human head
Upon her tender breast.

Enter sprite with fan-shaped corals of lace-like beauty. The sisters move toward her with cries of admiration, each choosing one for herself excepting DISA, who lingers thoughtfully by SIGRID.

DISA. How fortunate
To see a human being! [*Without sounds of
revelry are heard.*]

GERDA. Idle sprites,
If you had chattered less, and labored more,
The jewels would be strung. Away, away,
And dare not show yourselves until you finish
That crimson chaplet. [*To sisters*] Do you
stay and greet
The guests, for I myself will take this fan
To Kirstin, and at last the necklaces.

Sprites advancing from either side present them to her. She secretes them in the folds of her garments. Exit GERDA. Some of the sprites scoop up the jewels left, and smooth the sand till no trace of their presence remains; others gather up the loose blossoms. They have barely time to escape when from the archway to the left enter with rhythmic motion a company of sea-folk in soft colored, trailing robes with bracelets of jade and amber gleaming on their naked arms. The music to which they keep time

is that of their own voices, accompanied by the strings of a great shell.

CHORUS

O life it is for pleasure, sweet pleasure un-
alloyed,
And let there be no measure until the heart is
cloyed.
Joy after joy we'll number before the senses
tire,
And then come blessed slumber to re-create de-
sire.

How like a thing of malice the human lot ap-
pears,
So soon to drain life's chalice of all its wine and
tears;
Gone youth, gone joy, gone laughter—all that
is life indeed—
And that to follow after that none may know or
need.

O give me breath and motion, quick pulses
throbbing high,
The wild delights of ocean and of the spray-
white sky,
Of years without affliction my thousand give to
me,
And take who will the fiction of immortality.

SISTERS [*clasping hands with the guests in an interchange of greetings*]

Welcome, thrice welcome, daughters of the sea,
And sea-kings, come the day to celebrate
When she, our youngest one, our best-beloved,
Hath visited the world on high.

SIGRID [*after a pause*] Nay, three
Are missing—Erik nowhere have I seen,
Thora, nor little Elwyn.

THORA *comes forward from the company to present herself.*

SISTERS. Welcome, Thora!

Hardly has she been greeted, when all turn to the entrance on the right. Hand in hand with GERDA enters KIRSTIN, clad in pearl-white, wearing the necklace of coral and that of pearl. The guests throng around her to kiss her hand, or if they cannot press near enough, must content themselves with kissing their hands to her.

CHORUS OF VOICES. Hail, all hail to Kirstin.
Joy be hers for a thousand years.

KIRSTIN. O happy, festal night,
O beautiful, wonderful sight.
Flowers and music, laughter and mirth—
Was there ever so sweet a banquet on earth?

CHORUS OF VOICES. All, all in Kirstin's
honor
We gather here to-night.

From the left enter ERIK, the deep-sea king,

whose arrival is greeted with applause. GERDA, extending her hand, receives him with impressive and cordial manner.

GERDA. Far thou journeyest to bring
Greeting unto us, great king,
Now that she, our little one,
Hath the chrism of the sun.

Presents him to KIRSTIN.

Erik, King of the Deep Sea.

KIRSTIN [*giving him her hand*] Comest thou
to honor me,

Erik, King of the Deep Sea?

ERIK. On this happy natal day
It is Kirstin we obey.
Bid me whatsoe'er you will.

KIRSTIN. You, whose word the storm can
still,

In whose palaces profound
Is no sunlight, stir, nor sound—

Erik, shall this little hand
Greatest of all kings command?

ERIK. Queen of nymphs, what shall it be?

KIRSTIN [*after a moment's thought*] Sing a
song of the deep sea.

The others fall back to listen, and stand massed to right and left. KIRSTIN gazes eagerly into ERIK's face as he sings.

DEEP-SEA SONG *

Fathomless, darkening deep,
Far below all unrest,
Calm more serene than sleep,
Known by the mermen blest.

Fathomless all delight:
Naught in the shimmering green
Reck we of Heaven's blight
On the hapless world between.

CHORUS

Roll on the distant mortal strand, ye waves of
Change and Time,
While deep, deep, deep in the vastness dim, a
thousand years are mine.

*The whole company take up this verse, which
rises and falls in a mighty volume, like the sound
of many waters.*

Call of deep unto deep,
Thunder of sounding tide,
Peril and loss that sweep
The path of the wind's wild ride.

Pouring the deep sea wine
Into the cup of gold,

* Written by Elisabeth Work Hooker.

Pledge me a love like mine,
Love that can ne'er grow old.

CHORUS

Roll on the distant mortal strand, ye waves of
Change and Time,
While deep, deep, deep in the vastness dim, a
thousand years are mine.

As the applause dies away, ERIK claims KIRSTIN for the dance, and followed by others, they pass to the ballroom through the corridors in the rear. THORA stays behind. GERDA, standing at the entrance to watch the dance, turning, glances over the deserted hall and spies her.

GERDA. Are you not dancing, Thora?
Then come watch
The graceful maze. With you away, the belle
Is Kirstin. All the kings and loveliest nymphs
Have come. Nay, one is missing. Tell me,
why
Is Elwyn absent?

Exeunt. Enter two tiny sprites, carrying a wreath of flowers. They tread slowly and cautiously.

FIRST. Music! Do you think
That I might peep inside?

SECOND. You are moon-mad!

FIRST. I wish that we could have one little
glimpse
Of Kirstin in her necklaces.

SECOND. I dare
Not think of such a thing.

FIRST. What will they do
With this red chaplet?

SECOND. Crown the birthday child
Queen of the Feast!

*They stand resting the crown on its edge,
then with much tugging lift it up to a niche in
the wall, and wiping their brows, sit down to
rest.*

SECOND. Now we must fly.

FIRST. I wish
I were a sea-nymph.

SECOND [*mischievously*] Gerda?

FIRST. Gerda! Kirstin.
They're coming.

SECOND. Away, away,

FIRST. Away.

*Exeunt sprites to the sea. Enter dancers
from rear. Enter other sprites from right
bearing little goblets of shells, and to THORA
is awarded the honor of placing on KIRSTIN'S
brow the chaplet of red flowers and of propos-
ing the toast.*

TOAST

Kirstin, Kirstin, Queen of Song,
Queen of Beauty, from this throng
Take the crown of Love and Praise;
Thine be delightful days!
Kirstin, hail to thee,
Pearl of the Sea.

After the toast is drunk, the sprites bear away the shells that served as cups, and falling back to give KIRSTIN audience, her guests demand a song from the Queen of Song. Flushed with pleasure, she sings

SONG OF THE GOLDEN APPLE

Far away in the pale-blue bowers
Of a silent southern sea,
With gold and crimson colored flowers,
Grows a wonderful tropic tree.

Far to seek and far to find,
The silver boughs that hold
The apple with the golden rind
And core of finest gold.

Down in the caves of dream and sleep,
From human fingers placed,
Only the children of the deep
That magic fruit may taste.

And having eaten of the tree,
Those who but once recline
Within its silver shade, shall be
Made merry as with wine.

We have slept in the pale-blue bowers
Of that silent southern sea,
We have plucked the crimson flowers
Of the wonderful tropic tree,

And the brows of us are smooth of care,
Our eyes are free from tears,
And our hearts shall be as light as air,
For a thousand, thousand years.

The song finished, all the sea-nymphs except THORA, who stands a little apart, stretch hands toward KIRSTIN in love and admiration without a trace of envy, and the kings draw near. She stands in their midst, radiant. Suddenly a dark shadow falls upon the company, moving slowly across the stage from right to left. The music breaks off, the sea-folk start and shiver at sight of the shadow, but KIRSTIN lifts her hands toward it in an impulsive gesture of yearning. A firm voice breaks the tension.

GERDA. 'Tis but the moving shadow of a ship.

And ignorant of the land above the sea
Where men live. Pray what is it to be human?

GERDA. What mean you by "What is it to
be human?"

Can you imagine beings made to miss
The joys we sea-folk know? Such is their lot.
They may not plunge down through the smooth,
green water,

Nor sit in grottoes bright with pearl and gold,
Drinking the deep-sea wine that fires the heart.

KIRSTIN. May they not dance upon the
golden sands,

Nor pluck the purple sea-anemones?

But the air of the world is very wide and free;
Surely they live forever there.

GERDA. They too

Must perish and be seen no more, but we
Live for a thousand years, before the joy
Of our glad being turns to nothingness
Of the sea's foam.

KIRSTIN. They do not live so long?

GERDA. Not half so long as we. Brief
lives and sad

Have they. Their babes are born with bitter
travail,

And all their years they struggle bitterly,
Stung by sharp throes of yearning and desire
Until their days numbered.

KIRSTIN. Is that all?

GERDA. No; finally, 'tis said, their grosser
part
Falls from them like a garment, and as we
Surmount the liquid steep when we desire
To reach the world above, so they surmount
The steep of air to breast some deep beyond,
We know not of.

KIRSTIN. Alas, and why should we
Not be immortal? Could I swim so high
To reach that world sublime, I would exchange
My thousand years for but a single day
With hope of that strange life.

GERDA. My child, my child,
Wild are your words. Our lot is truly best,
Far happier than that of humankind.

KIRSTIN. But we must finally return to
foam.

GERDA. To foam, indeed, after a thousand
years.

KIRSTIN. Alas that I must die, dashed like
the foam
On the sea's face, grown deaf to the sea sounds,
Blind to the sun and flowers! Is there no way
To gain what they have?

GERDA [*smiling*] Darling, what would
you,
A sea-nymph, do with an immortal soul?
This coral necklace is a better gift
Than soul immortal.

KIRSTIN [*laughing*] Little do I know
What souls are, but I like my necklaces
And shining gown; why, I can think of nothing
That I would rather have.

[*Fingering the necklaces*]

Is there no way

To win a soul immortal?

GERDA.

Ask me not.

We're better off without one. Pray what gain
Have human beings with their souls? Are they
One half so happy as the free sea-folk
Who have no soul, but live a thousand years?

KIRSTIN. And then return to foam.

GERDA.

A lucky end.

It might be worse. It would be far, far worse
To toil and suffer for a little span
And after that, who knows? How can there be
Sea-people rash enough to take the chance?

KIRSTIN. What chance? There is a way,
then.

GERDA.

Yes, one way,

But only one, and that impossible.

KIRSTIN. Wholly impossible?

GERDA.

Unless you gained

That which you cannot gain, child.

KIRSTIN.

And what is that?

GERDA. If thou couldst win a human be-
ing's heart,

Kirstin, so that he loved thee utterly,

And if with hand in thine before the priest
He vowed to love thee only evermore,
Then would this human soul flow into thine,
And thou wouldst share his immortality.

KIRSTIN. And has a human being never
loved
The daughter of a sea-king?

GERDA. No, for we
Are not as they who walk upon the earth.

KIRSTIN. Sea-people rash enough to take
the chance—
Gerda, what did you mean?

GERDA [*disturbed*] Did I say that?
Too long we tarry here.

Rises. Enter THORA in agitation. KIRSTIN rises.

THORA. Oh, have you heard
That Elwyn, fascinated by the spell
Of things above the sea, has fled away
To Astrid's cave?

KIRSTIN [*taking a step toward THORA*]
Astrid?

THORA. Know you not
Beyond my father's kingdom, and beyond
The pastures of the dreadful octopi,
Dwells the more dreadful Astrid, who hath
power
With subtle incantation? In her cave
Doth she compound strange simples, amulets,

And much by the sea-children is besought,
For whatsoe'er she will is brought to pass
By means of magic, and it seems that she
Hath wrought a spell whereby with dire distress

Sea-children may be made as human folk.

GERDA *stands a little behind KIRSTIN, fronting THORA with a look of horror. Enter a pair of dancers, tripping across the stage in the background, singing.*

O life was made to be merry and gay,
If the heart be light, then all is well.
We have no need to toil or pray,
Fathoms deep, where the sea-folk dwell—

KIRSTIN [*a strange light falls upon her uplifted face as she stands with hands clasped on her breast, murmuring:*]

Then would his human soul flow into mine,
And I should share his immortality.

Passing across the stage, she takes her seat under the sea-palm and gazes before her into the distance.

GERDA [*draws THORA closer, speaking rapidly in an undertone*]

And Kirstin too.

[*THORA makes an inarticulate exclamation.*]

Alas, what can be done

To save my child—it is the very thing
I dreaded most. My wits go round and round.
[*Puts her hands to her head.*]

O Thora, now the thoughts come clear and
plain.

A lover—yes, there's nothing else can make
A restless-hearted daughter of the sea
Cold to the cursed attraction.

Enter ERIK.

THORA [*already divining GERDA's intention,
takes one look at ERIK, and turning,
swiftly lays her hand on GERDA's arm.*]
No, no, no.

GERDA *skilfully detaches THORA's hand and
leads her aside, then with a gesture and whis-
pered word commits KIRSTIN to ERIK, who
nothing loath, moves toward her where she sits,
lost in her own thoughts. In the background
appears for a moment the face of GERDA
wreathed in satisfaction, and that of THORA
full of misery.*

ERIK [*approaching KIRSTIN*]
Dost know me not? Thy look is far away.
Thou art dreaming.

KIRSTIN. Yea, thou dost awaken me.

ERIK. Who am I?

KIRSTIN. Erik, King of the Deep
Sea,

Who sang to me a wonderful deep song
Of thy domain, down at the core of calm.

ERIK [*taking a place beside her*]

You know me by repute, what coral groves
Are mine, what palaces of rose and pearl,
So empty now.

KIRSTIN [*surprised*]

None through the ocean roves
But knows thy coral groves,
Where palaces, pillared and roofed with gold,
The sea's deep treasures hold.
Thy scepter summons all things in a trice.
Do all things not suffice?

ERIK. No, for the sea withholds from me its
 pearl,
The golden-hearted girl;
It is for you, dear heart, the golden throne
Waits there beside mine own,
For you the scepter and the coral crown,
The ring, the golden gown.

KIRSTIN. And this, all this you freely offer
 me,—
The kingdom of the sea?
Who would not on that wondrous throne sit
 down,
Clad in a golden gown,
Or roam through those delightful forest bow-
 ers,

Culling the fairest flowers?

ERIK. Happy shall be our life beyond compare,
Secure of woe and care—

He bends to embrace her, and she to yield herself to his embrace. Enter THORA, who stops and stands for an instant, looking at the pair, then turning, passes swiftly through the entrance to the sea. Song is heard.

Fathomless all delight.
Naught in the shimmering green
Reck we of Heaven's blight
On the hapless world between.

KIRSTIN [*drawing back and regarding him in perplexity*]

Happy beyond compare,
Secure of woe and care?
I wish there were a shadow on your brow
That I could smooth away.

ERIK. Beloved, now
You speak of that in which we have no part—
Shadows upon the brow, or in the heart.
A thousand years are ours for joy and pleasure.

KIRSTIN. A thousand years that soon fill up
the measure!

Song is heard.

Call of deep unto deep,
Thunder of sounding tide,
Peril and loss that sweep
The path of the wind's wild ride.

During the song, KIRSTIN rises, and going once more to the figurehead of the wrecked ship, gazes upon the marred face of the human maiden. From the ballroom come sounds of revelry.

ERIK [*recalling her thoughts*]
Are they not merry?

KIRSTIN [*coming back to her seat*]
I, I too, am gay,
Like them till I recall the final day
When we must vanish into foam for aye;
Then sad am I,
Yearning to things beneath that human sky.
Have you felt so?

ERIK. Too often, little one.
When first we see the sun
In youth, we are possessed
By fancies strange, that come to fill the breast
With longing and unrest.
I too have known them, but forget your fears.
Dreams pass as pass the years.

Almost you love me, but whene'er I lean
To clasp you, something seems to rise between
And shut me out. Is it another love?

KIRSTIN. No, Erik; but the spell of things
above

The sea. Within your eyes I cannot find
The deep look in the eyes of humankind,
Nor is my being swayed before your prayer
As something sways me in that wide blue air.
Go from me.

ERIK. O beloved, let me stay
And teach you how to love me.

KIRSTIN. Erik, nay;
Depart you must.

ERIK. Not till you name the day
When summoned to your side I may return.

KIRSTIN. Only when for your absent face I
yearn;
When over tides of song that rise and fall
I hear your deep voice call
My name.

ERIK. Your thoughts, beloved, that now
roam
Forth to a strange, high world, shall yet turn
home
To love that changes not. The day shall come.

ERIK *stands for a moment irresolute, then
with an air of determination departs through
the archway to the sea. Sounds of revelry*

grow louder. *A dancer passes in the background, calling KIRSTIN by name, but scarcely heeds that she does not respond. Laughter, music, and the tinkling of glasses floats from within, and again a chorus.*

Pouring the deep-sea wine
Into the cup of gold,
Pledge me a love like mine,
Love that can ne'er grow old.

KIRSTIN [*suddenly rising and listening intently; the crown of red flowers has fallen to her feet*]

A voice

That smites my heart, but not thy voice—O
Erik,

Deliver me with but a word, a look.
Hast thou no power whereby I may escape
This painful music, music piercing sweet,
Intolerable,—the keen voice of the world?

[*A group of revellers cross the stage in the background. Here a king is in hot pursuit of a nymph; one is being pelted with blossoms, another drenched with a shower from a wine cup. Exeunt all. With a passionate gesture she continues*]

O, I am utterly alone
Beneath the sea. For me henceforth no rest,

And there is none to aid me in my quest,
For those who love me best can only say
That idle dreams like mine will fade away.
So since none else can succor me or save,
Now will I seek the enchantress in her cave.

*She moves toward the entrance to the sea and
disappears.*

CURTAIN

ACT II

TABLEAU II

CAVE OF ASTRID THE ENCHANTRESS

A gloomy grotto, lower and less spacious than that of the scene preceding, is divided by the footlights into a form roughly semi-circular. An arch-like opening in the right wall up the stage leads to an inner cavern, and another, down the stage, to the witch's garden. Near the center of the background is the entrance to the sea, wave-worn and almost hidden by long, hanging weeds. On either side of this entrance the cave is decorated with a conventional design done in the skulls and thigh bones of shipwrecked sailors. The rock on the left wall, near the front of the stage, has the shape of shelves at a convenient height, forming a sort of cupboard, crowded with small, mysterious objects. A little farther down the stage stands the sooty cauldron inverted against the wall with three feet projecting, and beside it a long black spoon and a pair of sooty bellows. On the wall of the background to the left of

the entrance a great sword of gold is conspicuously displayed. A crane for the cauldron stands near the center of the stage and underneath it burns a green fire. A little to the left of this fire is a pile of rocks in the semblance of a couch, mantled with moss and weeds. The time is midnight of the same day.

As the curtain rises, ASTRID, the enchantress, is seen half-sitting, half-reclining on the weedy rocks, a repulsive picture of youth and beauty fallen to decay. The features once firm and regular are now collapsing; the nose and chin almost meet. Her shabby raiment, tattered like seaweed, blazes with jewels which are the eyes of living reptiles. The firelight casts a corpse-like pallor on her face, which is partly turned toward the audience, and on that of THORA, who suddenly entering in the background, steps from the shadows into the strong light, wild-eyed, and dressed as when she fled from KIRSTIN's banquet. ASTRID, not deigning to regard her, is swaying to and fro, weaving an invisible web with her skinny hands and droning to herself.

ASTRID [*drones*]

Sea-king, sea-nymph, hither haste—
Who by me hath been embraced

Shall have dainty fare to taste,
Amber wine and honey paste.

THORA. Woe, woe is me. How horrible a
place—
That was a serpent's fang that grazed my face.
Speak, are you Astrid?

ASTRID. None except the bold
Are welcome here.

THORA. Often have I been told
Of wonders you perform. By subtle skill
Do you not bring to pass whate'er you will?
[ASTRID *nods.*]

Oh, give me quickly, ere it be too late,
A magic charm to work on one I hate—
For I hate Kirstin.

ASTRID. What has Kirstin done
To make you hate her?

THORA. Snared the heart of one
Whom I love.

ASTRID. How?

THORA. By music's wondrous note—
Oh, she has magic in her round, white throat
To witch the heart out.

ASTRID. H'm, what it be?
Some sleeping-draught for Kirstin?

[*Rises and goes to the cupboard.*]

Only three
Drops of this potion—

THORA [*interrupting and shaking her head*]
Something to impair
Her spell of song, and make her—not so
fair.

ASTRID [*soothingly*] Yes, yes, here is the
very thing to slake
Your hatred surely, safely, but let's make
A little compact: if I serve you now,
Then must you serve me later.

THORA. How?

ASTRID. Somehow,
I'll find a way.

THORA, *shuddering, reaches for the phial.*
A sound is heard, and she starts and looks
toward the entrance in the background.

THORA. No one must see me here.

ASTRID [*pointing to the door leading to her*
garden, through which THORA disap-
pears]

Sea-king, sea-nymph, hither haste.
Who by me hath been embraced
Shall have dainty fare to taste,
Amber wine and honey paste.

[*Enter ERIK, who swiftly makes his way*
around the fire and stands before the en-
chantress.]

Who cometh to this cave? The deep-sea king
Omnipotent—he hasn't everything
Since he seeks Astrid.

ERIK. None has ever come
Perplexed as I am.

ASTRID. Pooh, 'tis but the sum
Of every plaint I hear, yet all's the same—
Two passions working in the blood like flame,
Diverse, yet one—which is it, love or hate,
And what shall I procure you?

ERIK. Astrid, wait.
I come not as a lover in despair,
Scorned and rejected.

ASTRID. Do the happy pair
Resort to me—

ERIK. I almost won her heart,
When suddenly she bade me to depart.

ASTRID. Ha, ha, a rival who must be displaced!

[Turning to her cupboard]
I know the very simple. Let her taste
Two drops of this.

ERIK. Not that, for well I know,
She hath no other lover.

ASTRID. Ho, ho, ho.
Shy and elusive is the budding maid.
Compel, break down her will.

ERIK. I am afraid
All would be lost. She sets me a strange test.
Could I be near, my love would warm her
breast,
But absent must I win her.

ASTRID [*running about*] H'm, my fire
To breed within a maiden's heart desire
For absent lover till she doth complain
At sound of music, pierced with secret pain,
And reach across the darkness arms that yearn
To welcome you.

ERIK [*rapidly*] Sibyl, how didst thou learn
The heart's most hidden secrets to divine,
Its innermost desires? To make her mine
Strong must you sow in her desire for me
To banish visions, fancies.

ASTRID. Ah, I see,—
Spell of the world. This philter has the power.

ERIK. As soon as tasted?

ASTRID. Maybe in an hour,
Or it may be a year—one can but guess;
The day will surely come.

ERIK [*taking the phial*] Now, sorceress,
Ask anything you will.

ASTRID. The price? The price
The merest trifle. Act on my advice,
And when you win your lady, bring her here
For Astrid's blessing.

ERIK. No, it costs too dear.

ASTRID. Too dear, forsooth? Depart and
take my curse;
So lose your precious treasure.

ERIK. That were worse.
Someone is heard approaching. ERIK takes

the phial which ASTRID offers and goes through the entrance to the cavern adjoining. Enter KIRSTIN, still wearing the necklaces of pearl and coral on the white gown, which is now stained and torn.

ASTRID [*spitefully*] Saw you my forest,
Faint-heart?

KIRSTIN [*panting so that she can hardly speak*] Octopi.

ASTRID. What marked you in the boughs?

KIRSTIN. A hundred things
Hugged horribly to death—white grinning
skulls

And chests of sunken treasure.

ASTRID. Was that all?

Why do you shudder?

KIRSTIN [*closing her eyes*] Everywhere I see
Poor little Elwyn's body folded close,
With livid eyelids and unhappy hair.

ASTRID. She shunned not the affectionate
caresses

Of my fair forest trees, and she is blest.

But you—

KIRSTIN. I bound my flying tresses high
From the dread touch, and with my hands
crossed so,

Darted between the trees as fishes glide,
To tell you—to tell you—

[*She hesitates and looks up.*]

ASTRID. To tell me, to tell me—

KIRSTIN. Alas, how can I tell you anything.

ASTRID. Would you be young forever, or
be old,

Or would you slay some rival at a stroke?

Have you some neighbor with too sharp a
tongue,

Or would you live another thousand years?

KIRSTIN. O Astrid, on my birthday comes a
change.

Sometimes with sudden start

I feel from out that arching sky so hollow,

The large air of the world blown keen and
strange

Into my heart,

And a voice bid me follow.

ASTRID. Ho, ho, sea-pleasures all
Begin to pall.

KIRSTIN. Not so, but I recall
That we must leave behind

Mirth, feasting, music, all

Our lives, frailer than foam upon the wind.

ASTRID. Child, 'tis a sore disease,
The hardest to control

Of anything in all the seas,—

You're threatened with a soul,

Yet I assure you

That I can cure you.

KIRSTIN. No.

ASTRID. Weren't you happier before?
Why darken then my door?

KIRSTIN. Yes, happier, for now my peace is
 gone,
Yet would I follow on
Where'er it leads my feet. The very pain
It brings me is a kind of joy and gain.

ASTRID. O foolish, vain,
Deluded sea-shape wish!
You'd better stay a fish.

Who wants to walk the earth like a human
being?

[*Laughter from ASTRID*]

Who wants to struggle and suffer like a hu-
man being?

[*Shrill laughter*]

Who wants to die like a human being?

[*Horrible laughter*]

It is my hardest charm, a special spell
Whose finest elements are brewed in hell.

[*She makes a peculiar whistling call, and one after another hideous shapes enter from without into the circle of light, and are dispatched on various errands. Sullenly and in silence they depart to do her will. Taking her cauldron she hangs it over the crane and into it throws objects from her cupboard and others which they bring, mumbling the while a monotonous singsong. Soon the kettle begins to*

steam and simmer, and joining hands they dance around the bubbling pot ever faster and faster, singing:]

CHANT

Toss into the brew
Freckled herb that rankest poison drew
Through its hungry, worm-white rootlets, fed
Where Death made his bed.

Fling into the pot
Fragments of the venom things that rot
On the ooze—the viscid entrails stink,
Gurgling as they sink.

Round and round therein
Stir mortality, and stir, stir sin,
Pains that rend the heart and joys that sting—
Hear the cauldron sing.

Stir into the brew
Hopes, a rainbow-colored, bubble crew.
Bubble dreams that never shall come true
Stir into the brew.

As the last two lines are being chanted, As-TRID bends over and scratches her shrivelled breast with her talons till black blood trickles into the mess. Then she stirs it with the long spoon and sips it critically.

ASTRID. Your name is—

KIRSTIN. Kirstin.

ASTRID [*laughing shrilly*] Kirstin, Kirstin.

[*Still laughing to herself, ASTRID bends to her task, watching the mixture, and at last pours some of it from the black spoon into a phial and holds it to the firelight, then close to KIRSTIN's eyes.*]

What do you see?

KIRSTIN. A liquor pure and white.

ASTRID. This tiny vase of crystal in my
hand

Holds the quintessence of humanity.

You love some human being in the world?

KIRSTIN. Do I love Osgod? I saved him
from the sea.

ASTRID. Who is this Osgod? [*KIRSTIN is silent.*]

Tell me.

KIRSTIN.

No.

ASTRID.

You must.

KIRSTIN [*after a long pause*]

When first into thin air I raised my head,

The sun was riding high above the sea

In rosy clouds. Beside me stood a ship,

With sailors, and one clad with majesty

Whom they called Osgod. While I gazed, a
storm

Darkened the sun, and all the sea was dark,

For gazing in thine eyes
To a new world I rise,
Never to die.

ASTRID. And still you bore your burden?

KIRSTIN. When my strength
Was almost gone, there was the land at last.
I laid him on the sand—a tiny pulse
Fluttered within his bosom; but suddenly
The thin air stifled me; I grew aware
Of beings not like us, who bade me backward
To mine own element. Veiling my face
With foam, I watched at the sea's edge and
saw—

ASTRID. What dreadful thing?

KIRSTIN. A maiden of their kind.

ASTRID. A human maiden—fearful to behold?

KIRSTIN. No, she was fairer than aught beneath the sea.

ASTRID. But fairer how?

KIRSTIN. She had a lovely face.
All white and rosy color.

ASTRID [*aside*] So have you.

KIRSTIN. And ropes of silken hair as bright
as gold.

ASTRID [*aside*] Gold hair have you.

KIRSTIN. Clad in a long white garment,
She came and knelt beside him on the shore—

Then in my heart I felt a spark of fire
Blaze up and burn me ; I grew hot with hate,
And dashed upon my breast the cold, salt spray.

ASTRID [*leering aside*] She loves this Osgod.

KIRSTIN. Other women came,
And helping one another bore his body
Back where their temple glittered through the
green.

ASTRID. And is that all?

KIRSTIN. 'Tis all. What must I do?

ASTRID. Depart to Elfrood shore where Osgod dwells,
And sip the phial thrice, so shall you sleep.
When you awaken, rise and leave the sea.
You shall be cleft asunder by a pain
More piercing than a knife, and thus be made
A child of earth with light and graceful
tread,

But every footstep that you take shall cost
Anguish intolerable and prints of blood
As if you trod upon a naked sword.

KIRSTIN [*shivering reaches for the phial*]
Let me go home and rest before I start
Upon my difficult quest.

ASTRID. No.

KIRSTIN. See no more
My father's mother and my sisters dear?
I cannot bear it.

[*She covers her face with her hands. Enter GERDA, who moving silently to KIRSTIN, touches her on the shoulder. KIRSTIN starts up with a little cry and clasps GERDA close.*]

GERDA. Child, your whole life long
Have I lain close beside you in the night,
Aware of it if you but stirred or sighed.
To-night so weary was I, grown so old,
I only woke to find the empty place,
And followed after you.

KIRSTIN. Through perils dire,
Dear Gerda—

ASTRID. Madam, you have been before
My guest.

GERDA. Yes, Astrid, years and years ago.
You meant to curse me, but the charm you gave
I cast away.

ASTRID [*ironically*] To wed a bold merking
And tend his children, else yourself had been
One with the human beings overhead.

KIRSTIN. So you suspected whither I had
come.

GERDA. And hurried here to save you from
your fate.
Sigrid was anxious too, and could not rest.
She waits for our return.

KIRSTIN. Sweet sister Sigrid!
O Gerda, lead me back, and I'll not flee

Your side again. Take breath, dear heart, and
rest,
Ere we begin our journey.

GERDA. Dear, I knew
The strange, wild spell would leave you as of
yore

My little sea-child, dancing merry-hearted
To sound of music on the golden sands.

KIRSTIN. O how I long once more with my
sweet sisters
To share that life.

ASTRID [*suddenly darting forward*]
But, Kirstin, you with sudden start
Shall feel from out that arch of sky so hollow
The large air of the world blown keen and
strange
Into your heart
And something bid you follow.

GERDA. Child, it shall bring you pain,
So shun it.

ASTRID. Shun it not. The very pain
It brings you is a kind of joy and gain.

GERDA. My child shall have instead sea-
pleasures all.

ASTRID. On you shall pleasure pall
When you recall
That you must leave behind
Mirth, feasting, music, all
Your life, frailer than foam upon the wind.

GERDA. Child, she hath cast on you an evil
spell,
This horrid hag of hell.

KIRSTIN. Nay, Gerda, 'tis the spell of things
above
The sea.

GERDA. O darling Kirstin, if my love,
Deep as a mother's love, hath weight with you,
Resist this fascination. 'Tis a lure
That calls a maiden by cold and lonely ways
Forth to a lot barren and comfortless.
Here is the love that clings to bind you fast
By all sweet ties dear to a woman's heart,
My love, the love of—

Enter ERIK.

KIRSTIN [*turns and sees him*] Erik—

ERIK. Here am I.

KIRSTIN. I called you not. O Erik, how
the world

Seems vast and lonely; like an alien
Should I go wandering, and who would reck
In that thin air, my immortality.

ERIK. Then, Kirstin, only place your hand
in mine—

My love shall be your shelter. Forevermore
Nothing can come between us.

ASTRID. Nothing between?
Nay, there shall come between
Voice of the world so keen.

At night when groom and bride
Lie silent, side by side,
That call without a word
Shall sunder as a sword.

She makes a downward gesture.

KIRSTIN. But what if I deny
That voice and stand with Erik?

ASTRID. You shall hear
A voice he hears not, calling like a bell
Desires that mock the heart if once denied.

KIRSTIN. But even this were better than
that cold,
High fate to live unloved and comfortless.

ASTRID. Have you forgotten Osgod? Side
by side
The lover and his bride
Shall hear that music high,
A bell, calling their spirits to the sky.

ERIK. Osgod?

GERDA. Kirstin, Kirstin.
My own, you will not listen to the words
Of this foul hag, when one who loves you well—

ASTRID [*fiercely*] Silence.

Enter THORA.

KIRSTIN. Erik and Gerda, say no more,
For now the way is plain.

ERIK. Nay, in love's name
One little word—what can this Osgod give
More than the sea-kings?

KIRSTIN. An immortal soul.

O Gerda, Gerda. [*Throwing her arms about GERDA'S neck.*]

ASTRID [*taking the phial from ERIK, and pouring its contents into the one which she herself holds*]

Hist, your turn shall come.

THORA [*pressing forward*]

But Erik, I—

ERIK. You!

THORA [*taking a step in the direction of* KIRSTIN]

Sea-shape, may your love
Be spurned one day as mine is.

ASTRID [*taking from THORA the phial which she holds and pouring its contents into the one which is in her own hand*]

Patience, this

Will take her sweetest song.

KIRSTIN. Farewell, farewell.

My choice is made.

She goes apart from the others, and stands erect with face averted and hands clasped, to avoid the pain of parting. Exit GERDA, then THORA, and finally ERIK.

ASTRID [*after a long pause*] But what if
you should fail
To win your princeling, Kirstin?

KIRSTIN [*facing about and taking a step forward in surprise*]

Fail! Should fail
To win him? Will a little love avail?

ASTRID. If to win his heart you fail,
Nothing, nothing can avail,—
His whole heart, grown dearer far
Than all other loved ones are.
By the priest you must be wed—
Should another maid instead
Be his choice, upon the morrow
Shall you taste of sorrow:
When the sky with dawn grows red
To your mermaid end you come,
Back unto the ocean foam.

KIRSTIN [*reaching for the phial*]

I would venture.

ASTRID. Hold, my fee.
Shouldn't something come to me?
I will take—

KIRSTIN. Oh, do not speak;
I should be defenceless, weak.
With song whereby the sea-kings were enraptured
A man's heart might be captured;
I cannot give my voice.

ASTRID. I gave my blood.
Where's your grace, your lovely eyes?
Surely they can catch a prize.

Don't be niggardly, your voice
Keep, but unto me belongs
Now and then one of your songs—
Say just one, your sweetest song.

KIRSTIN. I do not know
Which is my sweetest song.

ASTRID. Then I will choose.

KIRSTIN. Is there no other way?

ASTRID. No other way.

[*She beckons KIRSTIN nearer, and after making a sign upon her lips hands her the phial. Then pointing to the golden sword suspended on the wall, she goes and takes it down.*]

Kirstin, from my precious hoard
Take the magic sword.

KIRSTIN. Sword? I shall not need a sword.

ASTRID. You will need it, on my word.
Read the line thereon engraved:

[*Offers it to KIRSTIN*]

KIRSTIN [*wondering*] "With this sword my
life I saved."

[*Hands it back*]

ASTRID [*crossly*] Farewell, farewell.

[*Exit KIRSTIN bearing the phial. ASTRID, alone, reads again the words on the sword:*]

"With this sword my life I saved."

Once I was like to you. A foolish quest
Like yours has made me what I am. Farewell.

[*The last two lines are repeated with the ef-*

fect of an echo by the misshapen creatures hiding in the shadows outside the circle of firelight. The flame under the cauldron flickers and almost dies out, then flares up again. The witch bursts into horrible laughter.]

Now, Kirstin, win yourself if win you can,
The love of Osgod, and an immortal soul.

[She hobbles to the smoking pot and vindictively stirs the contents with the point of her golden sword, chanting:]

Stir into the brew,
Hopes, a rainbow-colored bubble crew,
Bubble dreams that never shall come true,
Stir into the brew.

CURTAIN

ACT III

TABLEAU III

AUDIENCE HALL OF DAGMAR'S PALACE IN THE WORLD ABOVE

The place is lofty and dignified in aspect. About two-thirds of the distance across the stage to the left are three tall pillars, beyond which lies a terrace with steps leading down to the sea, which is plainly visible. Near the center of the right wall a wide door gives entrance to the rest of the palace except a tower in which are the apartments of Dagmar and of Osgod. This tower is reached by way of the terrace, which is continued around the rear of the hall so that a person passing to the tower can be seen through a deep window in the background. The canopy and hangings of the hall, the cushions of benches and throne are of rich velvet, producing an effect of warmth and color in strong contrast with the marble or alabaster of the columns and the cool blue of sea and sky. The time is afternoon, about a month having elapsed since the preceding act.

The LORD HIGH CHAMBERLAIN is discovered placing a drapery of black on the chair of state. From the shore hurriedly enters a sailor roughly dressed.

SAILOR [*breathless*] Audience with her majesty I crave.

CHAMBERLAIN [*ironically*] In sorest urgency and haste.

SAILOR. I bring
Good tidings that shall make your present toil
Useless.

CHAMBERLAIN. Pray then, reveal them!

SAILOR. To the queen.

CHAMBERLAIN. The queen! The queen is
inaccessible.

Immured within the tower hath she sent
Couriers far and wide to scour the sea—

SAILOR. Who bring?

CHAMBERLAIN. Mere rumors till the queen
refuses.

Rumors that still knock at the palace gate.

SAILOR. No idle tale is mine, but come so
straight

That all can be attested.

My brother sails upon a fishing boat
To northern shoals. A month ago the storm
That wrecked Prince Osgod in his pleasure boat
Disabled them, and he has just returned
In time the second tempest to escape.

Upon a lonely island where they moored,
Their rigging to repair, he learned that one
Flung by the raging waters on the strand
Found shelter in a convent and was now
Returning to this kingdom.

CHAMBERLAIN [*indifferently*] Shipwrecked
men

Are common, learns our heavy-hearted queen,
Knowing too well the sea hath taken toll
Of her own flesh and blood. The angry storm
That swept the sleeping ocean yestere'en,
So like the first, brings back her first despair—

SAILOR. Conduct me to her presence.

Three notes of the bugle are heard.

CHAMBERLAIN. More than a month ago the
triple horn

Summoned the court to speed our blessed prince
Upon his pleasure-voyage, and to-night,
Our courtiers for the first time reassembled
Since that ill-fated hour shall meet to hear
Mourning proclaimed throughout the kingdom.

Hark,

Here comes the queen. Forbear to trouble her.

*Through the window in the background DAG-
MAR is seen. Exeunt CHAMBERLAIN and SAILOR.
Enter QUEEN by terrace.*

DAGMAR [*gazing out over the water*]

No sail upon the sea, ah God, no sail!
Mine eyes are weary watching for a sail.

Last night I lay with casement open wide
 And saw the swollen sea, moon-lighted, calm,
 Clean after shipwreck, till I swooned asleep
 And woke dry-eyed, still watching for a sail,
 His sail that comes not. Sharper than the
 throes

In time of travail are these bitter pains
 That bear no fruit. O my beloved son,
 Dearer to me than mine own flesh and blood,
 I can contend no more—so many days,
 So many weary nights have come and gone,
 As silent as the grave save when I hear
 Echoes that haunt the chambers of my brain,
 His footstep and his call—

[Seating herself on one of the benches, she covers her eyes with her hands. Two men, the one old, the other young, both shabby and travel-worn, their garments stained with brine, ascend the steps, and entering through the portico, stand silently before her. DAGMAR listens intently, then uncovers her eyes.]

Can it indeed

Be he I mourn for, not a phantom shape
 Of mine own thought?

[Rising, she comes nearer and lays her hands upon the youth.]

It is my child, my son

Osgod.

Osgod. O mother!

DAGMAR Not a lineament
Is changed. Lo, lip and forehead, brow and
 eye,

The same, almost the same.

*Enter the SAILOR, followed by the protesting
CHAMBERLAIN.*

SAILOR. There stands the prince
[CHAMBERLAIN *falls back in astonishment.*]
To prove my message not a rumor vain.
Were you not cast upon a rocky isle
And sheltered in a convent?

OSGOD. You speak truth,
Sailor, for here am I. This ancient man
Is keeper of the convent.

SAILOR. Your majesty,
I did but seek an audience, to bring
Tidings to turn your sorrow into joy.
My brother, coming from a northern cruise—
Each year he journeys to the fishing shoals—
Learned that a man flung on a rocky isle
Found shelter in a convent and was now
Returning here.

[*Addressing* CHAMBERLAIN]

Was that an idle tale?

KEEPER. The keeper of the convent, have
I come
To bring Prince Osgod back.

SAILOR. The storm last night
How did you weather?

- OSGOD. In a quiet bay
Whose arm shut out the sea.
- KEEPER. Upon our strand
We found him flung by breakers as one dead.
- CHAMBERLAIN. Your vessel drove upon a
hidden reef?
- OSGOD. No, we were far out when the storm
descended—
Gone are my gallant mariners, my ship,
All, all are gone.
- CHAMBERLAIN. How did you reach the
shore?
- OSGOD. I know not. From that moment
all was dark.
Half-stunned, I seemed to sink in perfect peace,
Knowing that life was ended, then the sea
Had arms beneath and a soft breast that bore
me
Out of the storm and darkness; nor should I
Be standing here but for the gentle nuns
Who nursed me back to life.
- DAGMAR [*stripping off jewels from throat
and wrists*]
- Take these, and these,
To show the nuns my gratitude.
- KEEPER. Our needs
Are few, yet do we know of needier.
For them I take your gift.

Lifting the lofty task that I lay down,
Who but my son, heir to the ancient throne,
The noble spirit?

OSGOD. Once would I have found
Such sayings dark—to ride, to hunt, to sail,
To follow problem-wise affairs of state
Was all my care, but now, but now, a veil
Has fallen from my vision, and I see
Things hid before—the future like a dream
Beckons to service for some high emprise,
And in my bosom, glowing like a star,
I feel the sense of immortality
So strong that nothing seems impossible.
What must I do?

DAGMAR [*slowly, with her eyes on his face*]

First, Osgod, choose your queen.

[*Reading his look*]

Her name, her birthright tell, her mien, her
look.

Dwelleth she in my kingdom or afar?

OSGOD [*dreamily*] The face, the face I can-
not all forget

Nor all remember—it was faintly seen
O'er distances of dream as through a mist
That with its revelation half conceals,
Yet longed for as the moon is when a cloud
Drifts o'er her loveliness.

DAGMAR.

Ever were you

A dreamer of strange dreams. You cannot
love

That which you know so vaguely—some hand
or face—

OSGOD. I should not know her by the hand
or face,

Not loving her for these; but when she sang
I felt her spirit throbbing through the words
And mine went forth to meet it. Were I dead
And turned to dust, I should awake and rise
If that voice called me.

DAGMAR. Know her by the voice?

OSGOD. Voice tells the soul.

[*Three trumpet notes sound again.*]

'Tis the horn

That bids the court assemble!

DAGMAR. You have come

To turn our morning to a festival.

Join us ere long in the great banquet hall.

[*OSGOD conducts her to chair of state. Exit
to tower by way of the terrace.*]

Some mystic being this, born of a dream

Delirious. Madness it is—or love.

[*From the right enter courtiers.*]

Ye noble knights and ladies of my court,

Learn how our bitterness gives way to joy—

Osgod is saved.

[*Cheering loud and prolonged*]

His vessel gone, his sailors in the sea—
God rest the faithful souls he summoned home;
Through all the land shall mass for them be
said

And never let their households come to want—
Heaven has restored him for the kingdom's
weal.

Osgod is here.

[*Great excitement and cheering*]

As Heaven hath been bountiful to me
In giving back my son, so let this hand
Be bountiful; first to the convent where
They nursed him back to life.

To each and all my nobles do I make
A gift of gold and land. If there be one
Indebted to the crown, that debt shall be
Remitted. Whosoever hath done wrong
Against the crown, likewise his penalty
Shall be remitted.

And since our prince, though flung a castaway
Upon a foreign coast, yet did not lack
For gentle ministration in his need,
Let one cast on our shore, though alien,
Fare with us as he fared.

*Applause, interrupted by the entrance of a
courier from the shore, leading by the hand*

the timid figure of KIRSTIN, clothed in wet weeds and grasses, with trailing hair. He advances to the dais and with a gesture presents her to the queen.

COURIER. Your majesty,
Behold the gift of the sea.

DAGMAR. A castaway.
Lo, Heaven hath heard the vow I made to-
night.

And calls me to fulfil the pledge I gave.
'Twas a wild storm that dashed upon our shore
This helpless child. Go bid my tiring-women
Give her a silken garb and loose her hair
As our court damsels do.

[The QUEEN with a gesture has entrusted KIRSTIN to one of the ladies-in-waiting. *Exeunt.*]

Whence had she come
And where were her companions?

COURIER. I could learn
Nothing save that her kindred suffered death
By shipwreck, for she called herself alone
In the great world.

VOICE. What loveliness and grace!

VOICE. How innocent a look!

VOICE. Her beauty moves me
Like music o'er the moonlit sea.

VOICE. My heart
Was touched to think of her calamity.

She stood there, timid as a child but yet
With something of the woman.

VOICE. Beautiful.

VOICE. Yes, rarely beautiful, but with a
look

Such as I never saw, for something lacked,—
I know not what.

VOICE. 'Twas as you often see
Faces of children, or of those who lie
In tranced sleep.

Fanfare of trumpets is heard, and from the shore enters a trumpeter followed by six standard bearers forming a double column. They advance toward the throne and the courtiers part to give them place. Their banners bear the device of a raven, black on a field of azure. The double column divides to form an avenue down which advances a legate dressed in black and azure, bearing in his hand a letter with a silver seal. He kneels at the foot of the throne and rising speaks:

LEGATE. Greeting, your majesty,
From Solmund whom Dagmar congratulates
On Osgod's rescue. Peace and length of days
Forevermore be to this noble house.

DAGMAR. But whence had Solmund tidings
of my son?

LEGATE. Inga, of late returning from the
north,

Brought the glad news of his deliverance.
And Solmund, with a greeting to your prince,
Osgod, would have him come to celebrate
The birthday banquet on next Woden's day
When Inga comes of age. To Osgod's hands
This missive must I give.

DAGMAR. Ere you return,
Thanks fitting Solmund's royal courtesy
Shall be inscribed in letters of fine gold.

[Turning to the courier]

Conduct him to the tower and these men
Delaying here shall duly be refreshed
When Osgod joins us in the banquet hall.

[Exit LEGATE to the tower, conducted by the courier who led in KIRSTIN. Through the door to the right, ushered by serving women, one on either side, enter KIRSTIN, dressed in white with a golden cord at the waist and her golden hair bound high in a coronet. In her hand she bears a red rose. Moving forward shyly, she hesitates, then throws herself at the feet of the QUEEN, who commands her to rise.]

Child, what shall I call you?

KIRSTIN. My name is Kirstin.

DAGMAR. Dear little Kirstin, 'tis a cruel
fate

That brought you hither; be not anxious, child,
For we have welcomed you into our hearts.
Among my maids of honor take your place.

[The ladies-in-waiting make room for her in their midst.]

Now shall the hour be given to merrymaking,
For we have ample reason to rejoice.
Music comes first—yea, a thanksgiving song
From our sweet singer.

VOICE. Daarte, your majesty,
Was ill, and could not come.

KIRSTIN [*rising eagerly*] Oh, let me sing.
I long to sing before you.

[*Standing before the QUEEN she forgets everything but the power of her spell through song and the desire to please one who has received her so kindly. The eyes of all are fixed upon her as she begins to sing in a voice of exquisite purity:*]

IF I MAY NOT HAVE THE ROSE

If I may not have the rose
That within the garden grows,
Human-hearted, perfect, red,
What is anything instead?
Other beauty though there be,
Do not offer it to me—
Nothing in the garden grows
If I may not have the rose.

If I may not have thy love,
All I seek below, above,

In that perfect heart of thine,
Oh, what poverty is mine!
To my passion be thou cold,
Vain is all the skies enfold,
Everything below, above,
If I may not have thy love.

They stand charmed by the sweetness of her song. As she takes her seat again, enter OS-GOD and the LEGATE. At sight of him, the whole court applaud.

OSGOD. This life saved from the sea I dedicate

To welfare of the kingdom, studying
The highest good of all. [*Applause*]

Though I am loath
So soon this birthday banquet to attend,
Since Solmund was my father's firm ally,
Knit fast to him by loyalty and love,
I will accept.

LEGATE. To grace her festival
Six maids of honor Inga prays you send.

DAGMAR. Five I appoint in order of their rank.

The sixth one shall be Kirstin.

One after one they rise in acknowledgment of the honor till KIRSTIN finally stands.

OSGOD [*gazing at KIRSTIN in amazement*]
Who is Kirstin?

DAGMAR. Osgod, to-night in presence of
the court
I made this vow to Heaven.

Since our prince,
Though flung a castaway on a strange isle,
For kindly ministration did not lack,
Let one cast by the tempest on our strand
Fare with us as he fared. Scarce had I ceased
When from the terrace came a courier
Leading this child, the weeds that covered her
All dripping from the brine. If I be judge,
She is a princess rescued from the storm
That stole away her kin. I welcomed her
Into our hearts, giving her place among
My maids of honor, the noblest of the land.
Behold the gift of the sea. [*Enter CHAMBER-
LAIN.*]

CHAMBERLAIN. All is prepared.

DAGMAR [*rising*] Kirstin, attend me to the
banquet hall.

KIRSTIN *steps toward* DAGMAR. OSGOD,
swiftly moving forward, addresses low words
to DAGMAR, who communicates them to KIR-
STIN. The latter remains where she is stand-
ing while DAGMAR and the various personages
of her court, accompanied by the LEGATE and
retinue from the court of SOLMUND, exeunt to
the right. OSGOD is left alone with KIRSTIN,
who stands modestly looking down.

OSGOD. A vision oft appears to me at night,
And thou art like that vision. I behold
A maiden clothed about with mystery,
Smiling upon me faintly as I sleep.
'Tis my beloved standing silently—
Her pure face dawning from an angry sky,
The voice, the voice that called my spirit back
Frustrating Death. Child of the sea, art thou
The one? Oh, tell me so.

KIRSTIN. How wilt thou know
That I am thy beloved one? This hand
Dost thou remember?

Gives him her hand, which he kisses.

OSGOD.

Not by her hand or features,
Not by her glance or mien,
Not by her speech or silence
Shall she be known, my queen,

But by her lovely spirit,
In song, in song outpoured,
Whereby my soul escaping
From Death, to Heaven soared.

Were I asleep, or lying
Dead under marble skies,
If that dear voice should call me,
I would awake and rise.

KIRSTIN. Then song shall be the test?

OSGOD.

The test be song.

He stands gazing at KIRSTIN, who meets his yearning eyes with a look of joy. Her breast rises and falls but no sound comes from her lips. After a long pause the silence becomes tense. She covers her face with her hands, and a long shudder passes over her frame. OSGOD, profoundly disappointed, starts to follow the company to the banquet hall.

Alas, she cannot sing!

Exit OSGOD.

CURTAIN

Curtain, rising, shows KIRSTIN painfully dragging herself down the steps of the terrace as if she trod upon a naked sword. Unloosing her sandals, she bathes her aching feet in the sea. A sound of singing comes faintly over the water in the twilight, and the golden heads of her sisters are visible.

SONG OF THE SEA-NYMPHS

Come home, come home.

Flee where the laughing water laves

A hundred hidden caves,

Lightly will we dance and roam

Over the purple waves
And the moon-paved paths of foam.
Softly, softly in our ears
Will the deep sea sing with never a word,
And the water kiss our faces,
As we go gliding, gliding down to the dim, deep
places,
Away from the pitiless sun and the parching air,
Away from the shard and the cruel sword.
Come, be washed clean of all desire and pain,
Then forth again
Over the fields of wind and foam
With never a woe or care,
To dance and sing for a thousand years,
Then melt away and return to foam,
Over the purple sea forevermore to roam.
Come home, come home.

[Now they are close at hand, calling]

Kirstin, Kirstin.

KIRSTIN. Sweet sisters, O what joy to hear
you speak.

Alas, that you have found me wan and weak!

ERLHILD. Oh, say that in your heart there
is no change—

Do you still love us? For your look is
strange.

KIRSTIN. Your sister still am I, though not
the same

As in those happy days before I came

Where human beings live; even as they,
I struggle, struggle on an upward way.

GUDRID. And is the heart of man beyond
your spell?

The mighty sea-kings, Kirstin, loved you well.
Ever doth deep-sea Erik dwell alone,
Waiting for you upon his golden throne
With calm, contented heart. Have you no
care

For constancy?

KIRSTIN. Alas, I cannot share
The calm of one who knows a day will come
When he must melt into the ocean foam.
Nay, on a human bosom let me lean,
Urged, if it need be, by compulsion keen
To knowledge that is sorrow, so it be
The only price of immortality.

INGEBORG. But why should thy unhappy
sisters know
Sorrow as well as thou? Great is the blow
Descended on our house. From morn to morn
Our father grieves after his youngest born,
And none of us may soothe his trouble. She
Who tended thee in helpless infancy
Is melancholy grown. O sister dear,
What ruin hast thou wrought!

KIRSTIN. Oh, for one tear—
But one of the salt drops that bring relief
To human hearts o'ercharged with bitter grief!

Would ye could know, my sisters, how I yearn
To comfort ye.

ALL. Return to us, return!

KIRSTIN. To-night so near the prize I
 seemed to stand
That I could reach and take it in my hand
As one might pluck a flower.

SIGRID. Ah, but the flowers,
Or such as grow in these unhappy bowers,
Fade in the sun or wither at a touch.
The blossoms of our garden are not such.
They still bloom on unharmed by frost or heat,
Imperishably fair.

KIRSTIN. One little, sweet,
Quick-fading flower of earth is more to me
Than all the scentless blossoms of the sea.
 Sisters depart, sorrowfully singing.

SONG OF THE SEA-NYMPHS

Come home, come home.
Away from the pitiless sun and the parching
 air,
Away from the shard and the cruel sword.
Come be washed clean of all desire and pain,
Then forth again
Over the fields of wind and foam
With never a woe or care
To dance and sing for a thousand years—

[KIRSTIN *adds*]

Then melt away and return to foam—

[*They continue*]

Over the purple sea forevermore to roam,
Come home, come home.

KIRSTIN *sits listening with bowed head as the last notes are lost in the distance. Then putting on her sandals, with the firm tread of a being full of conscious energy and will she mounts the steps to the terrace, crosses the stage, and makes her exit to the right.*

CURTAIN

ACT IV

TABLEAU IV

PLEASURE BOAT OF OSGOD

The stage represents the forward end of the deck intersected by the footlights, toward which it extends in a slightly oblique direction. Down the stage a little to the right of the center, spars and rigging divide the space into two promenades, meeting somewhere near the bow, which is suggested in the obscure background. In front of the spars is the royal pavilion of gold and purple, the other apartments lying toward the bow in the direction indicated by the promenades. To the right, up the stage, the shore is reached by a gangway which is not visible. To the left is the deck rail with a low seat extending beneath, and still farther to the left the ocean itself, with the sky above.

Several days have elapsed since the events of the act preceding. The time is late evening during the celebration of INGA's birthday. The foreground is well but not brilliantly lighted by lanterns, and later by bright but fit-

ful moonlight. Finally the sky begins to redden and the action closes at daybreak.

At the rising of the curtain, two of the maids of honor from DAGMAR'S court are searching for KIRSTIN.

FIRST MAID OF HONOR. Where can she be?

SECOND. Have we not searched the ship
From stem to stern?

FIRST. She's vanished utterly.

SECOND. There's nowhere to seek further.

FIRST. And ashore
Has no one seen her.

SECOND. No, she lagged behind,
Nor joined us when we reached the banquet
hall,
Nor sat down at the banquet.

FIRST. Osgod sent
Myself to bring her.

SECOND. Then appointed me.
Scarce could he brook to go alone and greet
Solmund the king in his great hall of state,
For want of her. 'Tis she has wit to soothe
His weariness.

FIRST. And she has counsels wise
When broods his thought over the kingdom's
weal.

The favorite is she, by all beloved;
Yet none could envy her.

They utter startled cries, as a head suddenly appears over the right side of the boat and KIRSTIN lightly vaults upon the deck. She is dressed in some dark fabric, a close, sea-colored garment reaching just below the knee which emphasizes her slender grace, and a mist-like scarf, vague as an exhalation, flutters backward from her shoulder. She stands before the ladies of the court, a spirit of the sea incarnate, all vitality and beauty.

SECOND. Where have you been?

FIRST. And why did you desert us?

KIRSTIN. Chide me not.

All day I hungered for the open sea,
Pent by the stifling space, the narrow deck,
Parched by the hot, bright sunshine and the
wind.

At twilight, when great stars hung in the tide,
I left it all behind me for a plunge
Straight down into the ocean silver cool,
Singing around as the big bubbles rise.
Mile after mile I swam beside the fishes
Over the infinite paths of ease and joy,
And come back new-made.

They stare at her, amazed at her strange words and manner.

FIRST. Without weariness?

KIRSTIN [*laughing*]

Weary are they who walk with stumbling feet

O'er the world's flint.

SECOND. From Osgod am I sent
To bid you go ashore and sit with him
At Inga's board.

FIRST. See, he could not endure
This long delay.

Enter OSGOD, who stops and regards KIRSTIN in wonder. Exeunt maids of honor.

OSGOD [*putting his hand to his brow*]

Whence comes that memory
Of one who plucked me from a raging sea,—
And I was borne upon a tender breast
Out of the storm and darkness.

KIRSTIN [*trembling*] You remember
That night?

Osgod. My soul, uplifted by a song,
Escaped from bondage to a world more high.
The echo of that song again I hear,
But all the world is musical to-night,—
Oh, listen, Kirstin, life is wonderful!
The thing we will with all our heart and soul
And never cease to will, is close at hand
When it appears remotest.

KIRSTIN [*with her hand trying to quiet her struggling heart*]

Can it be?

To-night, this very night?

Osgod. To-night. Once, Kirstin,
My inmost heart I showed you as a page

To read, how Love and Death came hand in
hand,
Inspiring me to use in service high
Life's earthly years that ever glide away.
The call to kingship haunts me and compels,
Yet lacking love, how poor my life and cold.
But suddenly has Heaven crowned the yearning
With revelation of my well-beloved
Who saved me from the sea.

KIRSTIN moves toward him with face transfigured. Enter INGA, tall, fair, and queenly, wearing the bridal wreath and veil. OSGOD starts forward, and placing INGA'S hand on his arm, they stand face to face with KIRSTIN, who looks from one to the other.

KIRSTIN. The nun, the nun
Who found you on the shore!

INGA. No, not a nun,
But in the convent for a time I tarried,
Taught by the sisters who gave gentle care
To motherless maidens.

KIRSTIN. And you knew her by—

OSGOD. This jewelled signet ring upon the
hand

That smoothed my pillow.—We have suffered
long

Hunger and thirst of the heart, so let this
night

Witness love's consummation. Will you go
Straight with me to the altar?

INGA. I have donned
My mother's veil and gown and come to ask
That when we stand before the priest to speak
Our marriage vows, you who have grown so
dear

To Osgod, yea, whom I already love
Will stand beside me,—sister have I none.

KIRSTIN [*with effort*]
'Tis a great honor by your side to stand,
Too great an honor.

INGA. Not for sake of honor,
For that is nothing, but we brides would fain
Have one we love to do us honor then,
One who is knit to us by special ties,
As you are knit to me.

[KIRSTIN *stands white-lipped and silent.*]

Refuse me not
Upon my wedding night.

Strains of music are heard. KIRSTIN, with a gesture of refusal, indicates the garment in which she has just come from the sea. INGA takes from her arm a long trailing cloak of silk which she throws over the shoulders of KIRSTIN, who is completely enveloped in its folds. With her own will overborne, she is led out by INGA to the music of the march, which becomes more and more insistent, and OSGOD follows.

Enter the two maids of honor, and three others from the banquet hall.

FIFTH MAID OF HONOR. A wedding march.

THIRD. 'Tis said that to the chapel Osgod
goes

To wed King Solmund's daughter.

FOURTH. It was she
Who nursed him back to life.

FIFTH. I, sitting near,
Beheld his look of wonder, recognition,
As when we mark a thing beyond belief.

SECOND. How came she in the convent?

THIRD. Motherless,
King Solmund placed her in the sisters' care.

FOURTH. The music changes to a requiem;
Yea, 'tis death music.

SECOND. Hath one passed from life?

FIRST. The drumbeat weighs heavily on my
heart.

THIRD. That mournful cadence comes not
from within,
'Tis of the sea, the moaning of the tides.

FOURTH. An ocean dirge for one departed.

[Covering her ears with her hands.]

Oh,
It stifles me.

FIFTH. And now the strain has changed
Once more and all is joyful, light and free.

SECOND. 'Tis a glad day that joins the
kingdoms twain.

FIRST. Minor again the music alternates.

Music, containing at first a mere suggestion of impending doom, continues alternately sad and joyful, rising to triumphant chords. Enter KIRSTIN, erect, almost stately, in the long silken cloak, but she crosses the deck unsteadily with trailing foot, and droops into a seat by the deck rail. The others hasten to support her, chafing her hands and unclasping the cloak.

SECOND. Poor child.

FIRST. It was that long swim in the sea.

Enter INGA and OSGOD in a crash of music. INGA, turning, throws flowers into the cheering company.

VOICES. Long live Inga.

Long live Osgod.

Long live Kirstin.

INGA [*to* OSGOD] To-morrow there will be
great merrymaking

Through all the land, but we shall be—

OSGOD.

To-morrow,

O word mysterious and magical.

For does there live a man beneath the sun

Who knows what strange or beautiful event

The next day hath in store?

KIRSTIN [*to herself*]
morrow—

To-morrow, to-

Enter sailor.

OSGOD [*to sailor*] Unfurl the sail and
swing into the deep

[*Exit sailor.*]

That we may cut the world off, you and I,
Hasting away from harshness and the din
Of earth's too dry and dusty common ways
To the great moving waters. 'Tis the hour
When the moon bares her beauty to the deep
And his heart is full.

KIRSTIN [*rising as if re-animated*]

On Osgod's wedding night,
A night to be remembered all the years,
There should be revelry, the maddest, merriest
Of music. Who will join me in the dance
In Inga's honor?

MAIDS OF HONOR [*in chorus*] I.

And I.

And I.

*They dance together, forming a kaleido-
scope of color and motion in the moonlight.
One after another drops out.*

FOURTH. I am too weary.

FIFTH.

It is late.

KIRSTIN.

But I

Could dance forever.

OSGOD [*impatient to be alone with Inga*]

That was beautiful.

INGA. I thank you all.

OSGOD. And now good-night.

KIRSTIN. Good-night.

Will you not kiss me both?

They kiss her. Exit KIRSTIN.

OSGOD. Inga, beloved,

I long to hear you sing—a song of joy

Such as you sang me in the temple white

Beside the sea; 'twas first for your sweet voice

That I began to love you.

INGA. Osgod, I

Sing? Nay, I cannot sing.

OSGOD. You cannot sing?

It was that song which called me back from
death

To a new life.

INGA. And would you know that song
Again?

OSGOD. Were I asleep, yea, were I dead
And turned to dust, I should awake and rise
If that voice called me.

INGA. Dear, it was some spell
Of your delirium, and not my voice
Who never sang.

OSGOD. Your spirit spoke to mine
As with a song, but now that I have you
I have no need of music nor of words.

Pacing down the deck in the moonlight, they disappear in the background. The lanterns are extinguished by sailors. In the foreground KIRSTIN, unable to rest, is heard softly and sorrowfully singing:

IF I MAY NOT HAVE THE ROSE

If I may not have the rose
That within the garden grows,
Human-hearted, perfect, red,
What is anything instead?
Other beauty though there be,
Do not offer it to me.
Nothing in the garden grows
If I may not have the rose.

If I may not have thy love,
All I seek below, above,
In that perfect heart of thine,
Oh, what poverty is mine.
To my passion be thou cold,
Vain is all the skies enfold,
Everything below, above,
If I may not have thy love.

The moon has gone under a cloud so that the figure of KIRSTIN is lost in the shadows. Enter OSGOD and INGA.

OSGOD. Once did the starry sky, brooding
above
Old ocean's tide, oppress me and o'erwhelm,
But now with thee, beloved, at my side,
Strong is my sense of immortality.

SONG OF IMMORTALITY

Ancient roams the sea
From hoary shore to shore,
But the sea shall be no more.

Lights that æons long
In yon high dome have hung,
Shall vanish like a song.

Earth shall fade away
From the undaunted soul,
And heaven as a scroll.

How late and dark—the very sea asleep.
It is the hour when night ebbs into day,
And life is at its lowest. Thou art weary.
Let us to rest. O night so long desired!

Exeunt to the royal pavilion.

KIRSTIN. Oh, weary is the heart
When it is nigh to breaking,
But they who are immortal need to sleep,
Not I who must depart,
Ere dawn is on the deep,

To sleep that knows no waking.
But the utmost pang
Of dissolution has no dread for me,
Since standing by the priest I heard him vow
To love her only, world without an end,
For in that moment my astonished heart
Closed on itself, anticipating death,
And dizzily before my staring eyes,
The world swam, a grey bubble. Even now
A veil is on my vision when I look
At the rare moon, yet as I close mine eyes
It all comes back, the unutterable beauty
Of cloud and sea, of hill and peopled town
With little children in the streets—oh, all
That moves us with the strange, sweet spell of
things
That were before we suffered, and will be
When we have ceased to suffer—I am swayed
By memories of childhood, and the sense
Of motion and of calm:
Sea-colors and sea-creatures, and the kind,
Protecting hands of little sea-nymph sisters,
And frolicsome hours together. O my father,
So hoary wise to teach me hidden lore
Of shells and flowers, and the strict guardian
care
Of my father's mother. Do they remember?
And will they grieve to know that I, who
reached

So far for life immortal, losing that,
Am beggared utterly? When I am nothing,
Still are they free to roam their thousand years
In the fields of wind and foam.

*She stops and listens to a sound of singing
heard faintly in the distance.*

SONG OF THE SEA-NYMPHS

Come home, come home,
For life was meant to be merry and free,
Come dance in the fields of wind and foam
Over the purple sea.

Wilt thou leave us blind with pain,
Whose eyes were never made for tears?
Wilt thou bid us grieve in vain
To the end of the thousand years?

Flee from the peak so flinty hard,
The pitiless sun and the parching air,
Flee from the sword and the cruel shard
To the liquid spiral stair.

Echoes from the coral caves
Over the fields of wind and foam,
Voices of the little waves,
Call, "Come home, come home."

The moon has gradually emerged from under the cloud, so that the shining heads of the sea-nymphs are visible as they support a great golden sword whose blade flashes in the moon-light.

KIRSTIN [*calling*] Sigrid, Disa, Erlihild, Ingeborg, Gudrid.

SIGRID. Dear little Kirstin, far from the mid-sea

Thy pain and peril beckoned us to thee.

KIRSTIN. O sisters dear, so pale with fear and care,

'Tis you indeed, but shorn of your long hair
Bright as the sun.

INGEBORG. From Astrid's dreadful cave
We bring this magic sword your life to save.
She would not yield it up for groan or prayer,
But only if we gave our golden hair.

KIRSTIN. Reft of your crown of beauty for
my sake—
What shall it profit me the sword to take?

[*Taking the sword.*]

DISA. Go plunge it in his heart, whose deeds
and words
Have pierced your heart more cruelly than
swords.

KIRSTIN. To slay him, Disa, cannot ease my
pain—
To foam must I return.

ERIK [*calling over the sea*] Kirstin, Kirstin.

Behold me, my beloved, come with speed
Out of the deep, knowing that you have need
Of Erik's love at last.

KIRSTIN. Down on your throne
How should you hear me, Erik, making moan?

ERIK. Far from the crash of tides that rise
 and fall,
It was my heart, dear love, that heard your
 call.

KIRSTIN. Thora, poor Thora. All that
 weight of woe
On me hath fallen, for the curse I know.
Heartbroken, doth she sit from all apart,
Grieving?

ERIK. Another king hath won her heart.

KIRSTIN. I called you not.

ERIK. Then had I never come,
Down to my deep-sea calm to bear you home.

KIRSTIN. O blessed calm.

ERIK. Of what avail the strife,
Of what avail the pain of human life?

KIRSTIN. Yea, what avail?

ERIK. Beloved, put it by,
The struggle after immortality,
And be my bride.

KIRSTIN. Erik, it cannot be.
No more am I a daughter of the sea.

Now that the end draws nigh, O to fulfil
My thousand years of life.

ERIK. Dear Kirstin, still
A single chance remains—do you not hold
In your right hand the magic sword of gold
From Astrid's cave?

KIRSTIN. Alas, I cannot slay
My well-beloved!

ERIK. Well-beloved? Nay.
Who hath destroyed your soul, your love hath
slain.

Choose, Kirstin, once again, between us twain.

KIRSTIN. Remember how I spurned your
love and strove
Only to gain a soul through Osgod's love;
Desiring, to your passion deaf and blind,
The immortality of humankind.

ERIK. If through my will, love, you could
gain the sky,
Lo, I would give you immortality.
Down there, from never-resting motion release
Waits where loud fury and the wind's havoc
cease,

At the very core of peace.

KIRSTIN. Ah me, to choose! I hang as on
a brink.

Depart and leave me here alone to think.

[*Exit* ERIK.]

Ah me, to choose! Devotion strong to save

Or love that is more cruel than the grave—
Nay, Osgod, lying innocent of blame,
Knows not my breath fades as a fading flame;
Yet life is sweet and one of us must die
Before the dawn—shall it be he or I?

[The east is already crimson as she advances toward the door of the royal pavilion, holding the sword firmly uplifted.]

Now let the blow on Osgod quickly fall,
I love thee not!

[The arm suddenly wavers and drops to her side.] Nay, love thee all in all.

[Turning, she flings the sword far out over the waves, and throws herself into the sea to be changed to foam, singing:]

Death came over the sea,
Chill and white of breath,
Only to veer and flee
Ghostly over the sea
One strong as Death.

Enter OSGOD in the rosy light.

OSGOD. The song, I hear the song! Oh, it
was Kirstin

Who saved me from the sea—you, only you
Could make my dream reality. Beloved,
I need you night and day, in life and death

Forevermore. Flee not this earthly place
So poor and cold without you.

*He stretches his arms toward her, but she
passes from his reach, rising higher and higher
into the flaming sky with a look of joy inex-
pressible, still singing:*

KIRSTIN.

Out of my world I rise,
If this be I,
For gazing in thine eyes
To a new world I rise,
Never to die.

*A company of heavenly beings welcome her
into their midst with a song which floats down
from above.*

CHORUS

Gone is the struggle,
Gone the sorrow,
Wide swings the portal
To the Invisible.
Love made thee human—
Sacrifice, pain—
And have made thee immortal,
Tireless and strong,
On pinions of love
With love the reward,
Bridging the worlds.

The harmonies of the song grow fainter and fainter, more and more remote, melting into silence.

CURTAIN

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 015 940 303 8

